

Why we say...

**Stop the
bombing**

**NATO out of
the Balkans**

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A COLONIAL WAR

"WESTERN OR Yankee imperialist" aims are not involved in the war, Ken Livingstone the British Labour MP claimed as he backed the bombing. Yet the US has certainly been the driving force in pushing for war, just as in numerous other military adventures over the last two decades, from the invasion of Grenada and Panama in the mid 1980s to the recent bombing of the Sudan and Iraq.

The US does not have two rival sets of armed forces and intelligence agencies, one of which does such barbaric things and one of which is committed only to benevolence and peace.

The same CIA chiefs, the same generals and the same politicians (from both main US political parties) are involved in all its policies.

The Clinton administration behind the bombing is the same Clinton administration that dances to the tune of Monsanto or Chiquita (formerly United Fruit) as it attempts to dictate trade policy to the third world. It is the same administration whose policies on debts mean, as Barton Briggs, a managing director of financiers Morgan Stanley put it, "200 million sullen Latin Americans sweating away in the hot sun for the next decade so that Citicorp can raise its dividend twice a year."

But, people ask, what is the US's motivation for going to war against Yugoslavia? After all, there is no oil there as there is in Iraq. Ever since the collapse of the old Eastern bloc ten years ago, the US has been out to show that it is the only superpower. Its strategic aim is to exercise "hegemony" throughout the world to get its way in any disagreement with other states, big or small.

But other big states are not always willing to go along with its schemes. There have, for instance, been repeated disputes over trade with the west European countries, such as the current "banana wars", and Japan. It has attempted to pull these states into line by showing it alone has the military power to act as world policeman, imposing the common requirements of the big states on any smaller 'rogue' state that steps out of line.

It did this admirably from its own twisted point of view in the 1991 war with Iraq. It made sure the middle east's oil supplies remained in western hands and persuaded Japan, the European powers and Saudi Arabia to pay most of its war costs.

It had another success in Croatia and Bosnia in the mid 1990s. The German government had ignited the Yugoslav powder keg by giving recognition to Croatia under a leader who admired the wartime fascist regime of the Ustashe.

But only the US was able to bring order to the breakaway states training the Croat army, arming the Bosnian Muslims, bombing the Serbs, and finally helping the Croats 'ethnically cleanse' most of the Croat Serbs.

Since then the US has set out to further cement its influence over Europe by expanding Nato to include three former Russian allies, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Now the Kosovan crisis has given it another chance to show it alone is capable of calling the shots in the European Union's own backyard. It reckons that European governments who rely on its military hardware against Yugoslavia will be much less likely to complain over its policies over trade, debt, Monsanto, middle east oil, or anything else.

The pro-war *Guardian* gave the game away when it argued, "Nato needs to be tested in its new guise and this conflict will do the job as well as any other".

The war involves two evil forces. One, Slobodan Milosevic, has horrible policies but can only implement them in a fairly limited area. The other, US imperialism, is just as capable of evil, but can do so on a world scale. Hundreds of thousands of dead in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and Indonesia are testimony to its crimes, just as the thousands of dead in Kosovo are testimony to Milosevic's crimes.

Ken Livingstone said that Tony Benn's opposition to the war put him in the position of someone who stood back when he saw a gang of thugs raping a woman. Livingstone's position is that of someone who relies on the likes of Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, to deal with the thugs.

IS MILOSEVIC THE NEW HITLER?

THE POUNDING of Serbia by NATO forces has driven home to millions the full horror and destruction of war. NATO military intervention is supposed to help the Albanians in Kosovo.

In reality it has accelerated their plight. It has provided a new and violent twist to the war on the ground and thrown up new casualties.

Western leaders say that fighter jets and cruise missiles, and the violence they inflict, are the only way to bring peace to the region.

In Ireland politicians like Bertie Ahern and "liberal" journalists like Fintan O Toole are backing the war against Serbia. They all justify this by saying that Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic is a "New Hitler" and must be stopped.

But Hitler was the leader of the world's second largest industrial power when he smashed the German workers' movement and took over in 1933. Serbia is a minor country with a totally devastated economy which produces less than Tunisia.

Hitler was a beacon for reactionaries all across the world and had the military power to threaten any other state. Serbia could not even totally defeat its smaller neighbours like Croatia and Bosnia during the recent wars. Milosevic is one of many leaders who have emerged since the collapse of Eastern Europe after 1989.

He is a former banker who turned into a raving nationalist in order to make a career for himself as popular opposition to the regime grew. His politics are hard right wing but he is not a fascist. In fact he is the Serbian

version of the British Tory Norman Tebbit rather than the Serbian Hitler.

The West was happy to support the local equivalents of Milosevic during the wars that followed the break up of Yugoslavia. Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia, adopted the symbols of the Croatian Ustashe regime which was allied with Hitler against Serbia during World War Two.

Tudjman denied that the Nazis killed six million Jews. He tried to crush all internal opposition and fiddled election results. None of this stopped first Germany and then the United States backing him.

The US regarded Milosevic as a useful man to implement the Dayton peace agreement at the end of the war in 1995. Richard Holbrooke, chief US negotiator, described him as "a man we can do business with, a man who recognises the realities of life in former Yugoslavia."

HOW THE BALKANS HAS BEEN USED

THE WORLD'S great powers have militarily intervened in the Balkans for over 120 years. As with today, at each stage they have claimed to be standing up for the rights of smaller nations in the region. Every intervention has brought misery, creating more divisions between ordinary people. They have drawn and redrawn the map, each time sowing the seeds for a further round of bloodletting.

In the 1870s Russia went to war with the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which governed the Balkans. Other European powers intervened, setting different groups against one another, including Serbs and Albanians. Britain used the excuse of atrocities against minorities in Bulgaria in 1878 to get involved.

Intervention led to wars between the Balkan states themselves- between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1885 for example. War erupted again in 1912. National groups-Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece-rose up against the decaying Turkish Empire which governed the Balkans.

The Balkan states then went to war with each other. The European powers scrambled to back competing sides. There were atrocities from all sides.

In 1913 the Great Powers signed the Treaty of London and Protocol of Florence, which recognised an independent Albania but left half the population outside the new state.

The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 were a prelude to the First World War which began when the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia. Once again the Great Powers encouraged the re-partition of states. The Western Allies made the secret Pact of London in 1915. The pact agreed to carve up the two year old Albanian state between Italy and Greece.

Britain backed the seizure of Kosovo and the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1919-20. The Great Powers gave Italy a mandate over central Albania as a reward for fighting against Germany.

In 1921 the Kosovans petitioned the League of Nations, the United Nations of its day. They begged for reunion with Albania. They stated that throughout Kosovo 12,371 people had been killed and 22,000 imprisoned since 1918. The League ignored them.

At the end of World War Two there was a workers' uprising in Greece which held out the possibility of unity across the various ethnic divides. Britain crushed that movement with an iron fist and propelled the Balkans into a front line in the Cold War.

THE KOSOVAN LIBERATION ARMY

Kosovo is one of the poorest areas in Europe. It is so poor that Serbs who were driven out of Croatia in 1995 refused to be settled there. Over the centuries Kosovo has been mainly populated by Albanians and Serbs. For much of the time they have spoken each other's languages. The balance between the two populations has constantly shifted. Albanians now make up about 90 percent of the population of Kosovo and Serbs about 10 percent. Throughout Kosovo's history larger states have played off Albanians against Serbs.

Kosovo was ruled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire up to the end of the 19th century. Under Serbian control at the end of the 19th century a Serb elite was favoured. Then the Italians dominated and backed Albanians against Serbs. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, and World War One, brought renewed Serb ascendancy. In World War Two Germany and Italy exploited Albanian grievances to try and turn them against the Serbs.

After World War Two Kosovo was again made part of Serbia in the wider federation of Yugoslavia. The Albanians were treated as second class citizens, just like the Catholics in Northern Ireland at the time. Economic stagnation in the late 1960s spurred nationalist movements. The Yugoslav state was forced to grant greater freedoms to Albanians in Kosovo and other groups in Yugoslavia to try and hold the state together. For a period middle class Albanians got most of the small number of good jobs. Most people remained poor.

As economic crisis deepened in the late 1980s Milosevic exploited the feeling of Serbs in Kosovo that they had been pushed aside. The Kosovan Albanians faced systematic repression after Milosevic stripped them of their autonomy in 1989.

Out of this repression the Democratic League of Kosovo was born. This was led by Ibrahim Rugova and it sought to organise the population into an alternative unofficial republic. However as frustration with Serbian repression grew, the Kosovan Liberation Army was formed.

Albanians in Kosovo responded to repression after 1989 by boycotting elections and setting up an unofficial parallel parliament. During all this period of repression the US showed no interest in the plight of the Kosovans

US president George Bush refused to even meet the Kosovan leaders. They were ignored in the US brokered Dayton agreement which was imposed on Bosnia in 1995. This cemented ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and shored up Tudjman, Milosevic and the other nationalist leaders. Only then did the Kosovo Liberation Army emerge. It did what the IRA in Northern Ireland and the PKK in Turkey did—launch a guerrilla war. In response Milosevic poured paramilitary police and troops into Kosovo. Foreign secretary Robin Cook and the US State Department denounced the KLA as "terrorists" 12 months ago. US secretary of state Madeleine Albright hinted at bombing both the KLA and Serbian forces last year. The West opposed the Kosovans' call for independence.

But now the KLA has fallen into the trap of calling for Western intervention. All experience shows that they are simply calling in a bigger thug to sort out a smaller thug. Even if NATO sent in their ground troops, they would not act as friends of the Kosovans. The only interests imperialist armies ever look after are their own.

In 1969, many Catholics in Northern Ireland looked to the British Army to offer them protection against sectarian gangs. British soldiers were offered cups of tea in areas like the Bogside in the hope that they would support the local population against the RUC.

But within a year, the British army turned on them. They imposed a curfew on the Lower Falls in Belfast to scour the area for weapons. By 1972, the paratroops had been sent to Derry to impose their version of law and order. The result was 13 murders on Bloody Sunday.

After the last Gulf War, a section of the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq looked to Britain and America to provide them with protection from Saddam Hussein. The Western powers used this plea for help as a way of imposing an effective partition of Iraq. The safe havens that were set up became reservations behind which the Kurds were imprisoned. When the Turkish army wanted to murder PKK militants it was given free access to the safe havens.

The other mistake the KLA made was to attack Serb civilians in Kosovo alongside Serbian forces. Its nationalist policies meant that it tarred all Serbs with the same brush. It has received backing and encouragement in this policy from the former President of Albania, Sali Berisha. He was involved in a major financial pyramid scandal which ruined the lives of many people. After he was overthrown the Albanian army began to break up. Berisha supplied the KLA with weapons and encouraged them to attack ordinary Serbians. Like other disgraced leaders in the areas he wanted to use Albanian nationalism to make a political come back.

Over the past twelve months Serbian police and army units have conducted a war against the Kosovo Liberation Army. Some 2,000 KLA fighters and Albanian civilians have been killed. The Serbian army has behaved in the same way Britain did in Ireland after World War One. It has copied every other state that says it is "fighting terrorism". Yet it has not inflicted as much suffering as the US did in Vietnam where it killed two million Vietnamese and destroyed thousands of villages. The Serbian forces have not aimed to

drive all two million Albanians out of the country. This however began to change after NATO bombing.

Despite the fact that the US, Britain France and Germany were warned that such a humanitarian disaster might follow their bombing they persisted in going ahead. While NATO generals sat in warships and fired cruise missiles, they did nothing to make any provision for the refugees.

The Serbian killings are horrific but it would be wrong to be taken in by the pro-war propaganda and call it genocide. The Nazis tried to murder a whole people-every Jew in Europe- during World War Two. Turkish forces killed 1.5 million Armenians during World War One and sought to wipe them out as a people. The killing in Kosovo, however, is on a similar scale to that in other civil wars around the world. Turkey, a member of NATO, has killed and displaced more people in its Kurdish areas than the Serbs have in Kosovo.

THE SPECTRE OF WAR RETURNS

THE Western bombing of Serbia makes a wider war across the Balkans more likely. It could have a tinderbox effect throughout the region, pulling many millions of people into conflict. It will encourage nationalist politicians in countries such as Hungary to open up dozens of border disputes and target minorities. They will think they have the West's backing against Serbia.

The Western-backed ex-leader of Albania is agitating in the north of the country for war against Serbia. The bombing already threatens to lead to the break up of Macedonia. The Albanian people are spread across six states-Albania itself, Kosovo, Montenegro, southern Serbia, Greece and Macedonia. They make up somewhere over a fifth of two million people who live in Macedonia. They have demanded separation from Macedonia and to be part of Albania. The break up of Macedonia would draw in neighbouring states. Bulgaria claims much of Macedonia as "Southern Bulgaria".

Any wider war would draw in the region's two biggest powers-Turkey and Greece. Greece is the second most militarised country in the world, after Israel. Turkey has the largest army in NATO after the US. They have come close to war three times in the last five years. There are potential flashpoints stretching from Eastern Europe across the Middle East, through the former states of the southern USSR up to the Chinese border.

War between the world's biggest powers-the US, Russia and China-is highly unlikely. But NATO's intervention in the Balkans has considerably raised the tensions between them. Russia and China oppose bombing Serbia, for their own strategic interests. They are talking about refusing to agree new limits on nuclear and other weapons with the US. The US is making conflict with China and Russia more likely by telling them that they have to bow down and accept its domination of the globe. Western intervention is

making every corner of the world more unstable.

The military wing of this Western alliance is NATO. It was formed in 1948 as a military alliance to patrol the world in the interests of the United States and its friends. It included Portugal, run by the openly fascist dictatorship of Salazar. At the centre of NATO from the beginning was the threat of nuclear annihilation held over the rest of the world.

Journalists like Fintan O'Toole claim that NATO is now functioning as a force for peace and humanitarian values. But this is like saying that a leopard can change its spots over night. The reality is that NATO has put down every challenge to the rule of the privileged.

Two years ago it was NATO "peacekeepers" who disarmed Albanian workers when they rose in revolt against their own corrupt ruling class.

There is strong evidence that NATO backed the right wing coups in 1967 in Greece and supported the military governments in Turkey. NATO has helped channel arms to US-supporting forces in various parts of the world. One example occurred in Madagascar in 1975 after the election of a left wing popular government. NATO agents provided weapons for right wing groups who murdered the president.

Anyone who thinks that NATO acts out of humanitarian considerations should look at NATO's role in the last Bosnian war. During that war NATO intervened decisively on the side of the Croatian, claiming that the Serbs were the sole cause of the war. The US Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, played a central role in helping to re-arm that state. According to the *Washington Post*, 'US officials, concerned with providing a counterweight to Serbia, helped Croatia avoid Sanctions in 1993'.

After Croatia re-armed it launched its Operation Storm against Serbs living in the Krajina region.. NATO bombing of Serbs in 1995 was timed to coincide with a Croat offensive which drove tens of thousands of Serbians from their homes. In all 200,000 Serbs were 'ethnically cleansed' with the help of weapons and logistical support supplied by NATO.

Today the US is once again leading the NATO intervention in the Balkans despite the possible consequences of a wider war. The US believes it can get its way wherever it wants. But this war also helps it stamp its authority in Europe, which is an increasingly important economic area. The US wants to be able to dictate what happens over issues such as entry to European markets, genetically modified food, Third World debt, and so on. Its methods range from "banana war" trade sanctions to the cruise missiles exploding in Serbia. The US also wants to stamp its authority on NATO as it expands to include new members from the former Soviet bloc.

But the US is not all powerful. The generals who have ordered the military strikes are terrified that they may be bogged down in a war they cannot win. Many are already referring to the Balkans as Europe's Vietnam. This worry has led to major divisions among the rulers of the Western powers.

All over the world the US is acting as the biggest bully on the block - but behind its threats there is a new weakness and instability. This is already evident in the Middle East. Here the pro US alliance of Arab states which

backed the first Gulf War has collapsed. The leaders of those countries know that unless they break with the US over Iraq they could be toppled by their own population.

The present war in the Balkans is a sign that the world has entered a more violent and unstable phase. But the rulers who launch these wars are by no means masters of events.

THE WEST'S RECORD ON HUMANITARIANISM

Fintan O'Toole claimed that while the US may be motivated by self interest, this does not preclude it have acting for 'genuine humanitarian reasons'. But the record does not bear this out. Whenever the West has intervened directly, claiming humanitarian motives, it has always brought disaster.

SOMALIA: At the end of 1992 US marines landed in Mogadishu, the

capital of Somalia in east Africa. President Bush said they were there to stop famine and end civil war.

"Some crises in the world cannot be solved without American involvement," he declared in a speech that could be repeated almost word for word by Clinton today. At first the 28,000 United Nations troops were welcomed by the local population. But the feeling that they had been rescued soon turned to hatred.

Western troops made no fundamental difference to the amount of food supplied. The soldiers' cruelty to local people also strengthened the hold of the Somali "warlords" they were supposed to disarm. Night after night US helicopter gunship pilots swooped over Mogadishu raining rockets and bullets.

The number of Somalis butchered will never be known-but it was certainly thousands. As an Italian soldier said recently, "On one occasion we fired for 24 hours non-stop. Officially they said there were 60 dead, when instead there were more than 1,000. Women and children were fired on unscrupulously." Last year three Belgian paratroopers faced a court martial on charges that they had tortured and murdered Somali civilians, including children. Pictures came out of Belgian soldiers roasting a Somali child alive

The human rights

THE KURDISH minority in Turkey face oppression every bit as savage as that meted out to the Albanians in Kosovo. But Turkey is a member of NATO and a key ally of the US and Israel. So the West arms Turkey, ignores its atrocities against Kurds and helped it kidnap Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan this year. Ocalan's arrest has brought a wave of repression against Kurds and socialists in Turkey. The army banned International Women's Day marches and arrested thousands of Kurds last month.

TULAY KOCAK, editorial director of the socialist paper *Workers Democracy*, was arrested last week for publishing an article about the Kurds.

This is a shortened version:

SINCE Abdullah Ocalan was brought to Turkey there has been an attempt to create a bank holiday atmosphere in Turkey. The media tries to make us forget our most basic problems and tells us that they are over and at last we will be able to be comfortable. The cause of the war that has killed 30,000 people, 15 times the number who have died in Kosovo, is not the so called "baby murderer" Ocalan.

The reasons for this war are the non-recognition of a people's ethnic and cultural identity, poverty, unemployment and oppression. Those who try to maintain these conditions are responsible for

NATO ignores

the war, not those who rebel against them. In this war about 27,000 Kurds living in the area have died and up to 3,500 security personnel. More than 21,000 of the dead were militants of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), up to 5,000 civilians and 1,000 village guards.

There is a Kurdish question in Turkey, however much it is denied here, and it cannot be described as the "terrorism of one or two bandits". The media do not even mention that the Kurds live in the poorest region of the country and are treated like second class citizens. The Kurds are put on trial for defending their most basic democratic and cultural rights. MPs who want to swear the parliamentary oath in their Kurdish mother

tongue are left to rot in jail. No one writes that the internationally recognised author Yasar Kemal is put on trial for criticising the oppression of Kurds.

Over three million Kurds have been forced to abandon their villages because they were accused of supporting the PKK. Half a million Kurds have been forced out to Europe. Kurds living in the big cities in Turkey are drowning in unemployment and poverty. How can we possibly have any interest in the oppression of a people that we live and work alongside? The force that is oppressing them is exploiting us. What Karl Marx said 150 years ago is our guiding light: "No nation that oppresses another can itself be free".)

over a fire. One Italian paratrooper said, "I went to Somalia with so much enthusiasm and instead the reality was disgusting." Canadian troops on the UN mission were shown to have murdered a Somali who had crawled into their camp looking for food.

PANAMA: In December 1989 US troops invaded Panama in Central America. This time the excuse was the behaviour of the country's head of state, Manuel Noriega. Noriega had once been on the payroll of the United States. A succession of US presidents ignored his links with the drug trade and his vicious suppression of any opposition.

But by the late 1980s he had become an embarrassment so, as with other people the West has dubbed "the new Hitler", a former hero was vilified and held up as an excuse for invasion. "Operation Just Cause" involved 26,000 US troops. Noriega was defeated but US artillery and bombs devastated large parts of Panama City, particularly the poorer areas. The US admitted there were over 200 civilian deaths. But recent research has shown that thousands more were killed, perhaps as many as 7,000. Dictator Noriega (anti-US) was replaced by dictator Endara (pro-US).

Tony Blair and US president Bill Clinton say the bombing of Serbia and Kosovo is to bring about justice and to protect the oppressed Albanians. But for decades the West has backed mass murderers and torturers so long as they fitted in with its interests. These tyrants have acted in a manner similar to, and often much worse than, the Serbian regime. Blair and Clinton accuse Serbia's Milosevic of killing 2,500 people in Kosovo.

But the West happily supports governments which have butchered hundreds of thousands. In the 1960s and 1970s the US fought a war against ordinary people in Vietnam. One million were killed in Vietnam and another one million in Cambodia.

During that war the US used, on a more horrific scale, the methods they now accuse Milosevic of using - search and destroy patrols, burning villages and driving out thousands of people. Britain used the same means against those who revolted against the empire, for example in Malaya. The US has murdered opponents, fixed elections and intervened throughout Central and South America to defend right wing forces which pushed US profit and power. Some 75,000 people were killed by US backed death squads in El Salvador. Today the West defends murderous regimes if they support the West, then demonises them if they step a little out of line. Saddam Hussein in Iraq went from being a "hero" in the war against Iran to villain when he was seen to threaten US oil interests. There are many other examples.

INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR: In 1965 the US backed General Suharto in sweeping away the slightly left wing government of Indonesia. All the Western powers now terrorising Serbia applauded his victory. At least 500,000 were killed by Suharto and his allies in the immediate aftermath of the coup.

When Portugal withdrew from its colony of East Timor in 1975, the Indonesian army occupied it. The airforce bombed villages indiscriminately and used heavy artillery against rebel movements and their civilian supporters. Suharto's men killed probably 120,000 of the 650,000 people in the

country.

US president Ford and his secretary of state Kissinger visited Suharto the day before the invasion and nodded it through. No task force was dispatched to free East Timor. Up until today the West has provided the weaponry that lets the Indonesian regime maintain its grip on East Timor.

ANGOLA: In 1975 the Portuguese colonialists were driven from the central African state of Angola. Right wing forces, particularly Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, attempted to bring down the MPLA government which came to office as a result of the uprising that defeated Portugal.

The US was determined to stop a left wing government controlling the country. From the beginning of the Angolan civil war the CIA channelled arms to UNITA. In 1981, when President Reagan took office, the US government swept away a Congressional ban on openly sending arms to movements like UNITA. The result plunged Angola into 20 years of bloodshed. The Angolan war has already claimed 750,000 lives. Two thirds of those killed were children. UNITA specialised in attacks on civilians and sowing landmines in villages. Over 65,000 people have had limbs amputated as a result.

ISRAEL AND SOUTH LEBANON: The West has backed Israel, the only certain nuclear power in the Middle East, for 50 years. Yet Israel is responsible for horrors far greater than anything that has happened in Kosovo.

At the birth of the state the Israeli government used terror to drive out 750,000 Palestinians. In a series of wars against its Arab neighbours Israel has always been able to rely on support from the United States. The US has not only handed over hundreds of millions of dollars of aid but also directly intervened in military conflicts on Israel's side, such as in the 1973 war. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon. Tens of thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese were slaughtered as refugee camps were bombed to rubble. Israel deliberately targeted hospitals with phosphorous and cluster bombs. During two major invasions in 1993 and 1996 the Israelis killed hundreds of civilians. Today some people argue that perhaps the US can do good in Kosovo even if not elsewhere. But the record of imperialism shows a consistent pattern where profit and power come first and ordinary people come nowhere.

IS THE UNITED NATIONS THE ALTERNATIVE?

Some of those who oppose the war, such as Labour's Phronias De Rossa, do so because it is not backed by the United Nations. But looking for the UN to take control represents a very poor alternative.

The UN is run by the world's biggest powers. It has never defended real freedom. It has backed the slaughter in the Gulf against Iraqi civilians. After the war, the UN imposed sanctions which led to the death of 200,000 Iraqis, according to the aid agency Oxfam. UN inspection teams also operated as spies who helped to pinpoint targets for subsequent NATO bombing missions.

The true function of the UN becomes obvious as soon as you look at its history.

During the Second World War, the United States, Britain and Russia referred to themselves as the 'united nations'. After the war Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, who between them carved the globe up into spheres of influence, also agreed to the establishment of the United Nations Organisation.

Whatever the UN charter says, its function was not to defend human rights, freedom, democracy and the rights to self determination. Rather it was to act as a fig leaf for the superpowers as they tried to police the world. From day one resolutions passed in the General Assembly of all members nations have been worthless unless they were backed by superpowers sitting on the UN Security Council.

The UN could only operate when the US needed it—for example during the Korean war in 1950 and in the Gulf War in 1991. Without US blessing nothing happened. So resolutions have been passed condemning Israel's occupation of Lebanon – but nothing was ever done.

One of the most bloody UN operations was in the Congo in 1960. This Belgian colony had been governed by the crudest divide and rule tactics and consequently when independence came, the country began to break up.

The mineral rich Katanga province, where Belgian and British interests were concentrated, tried to split away from the rest of the country. This move was physically supported by Belgian troops and mercenaries and verbally backed by Britain and the white settlers of Rhodesia.

Patrice Lumumba, the left wing President of the Congo, appealed to the UN for help. The US was delighted. The CIA already had Lumumba marked down as a Communist. India, Ireland, Sweden and Ethiopia provided the soldiers for the UN force but the US set the strategy and goals.

The US wanted a Congo without special Belgian and European interests and so the Katanga secession was smashed. Along the way President Lumumba was abducted, thrown into a UN plane and later murdered. He was replaced by the pro-American Mobutu who ran one of the bloodiest regimes in Africa for decades.

The UN has only been used when the superpowers agree on a strategy of separating lesser nations warring over regional dominance or as a cover for naked US aggression. When the big powers disagree, as is the case in the Balkans, the UN is simply discarded. Calling the UN to intervene instead of the US therefore makes no sense.

THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

The struggle from below is the real solution to the problems in the Balkans and elsewhere.

Instead of hoping that NATO bombs can solve the problems, socialists point to the possibility of pro-democracy movements rising against the nationalist thugs of the region.

This is by no means a utopian project. The Milosevic regime has faced huge opposition before NATO's intervention. Before the NATO bombing *Financial Times* journalist Guy Dinmore reported that there were many small protests by the mothers of Serbian conscripts against the war in Kosovo. They asked why Milosevic's son Marko, who owns a nightclub and likes sports cars, was not drafted to fight. Now those voices have been drowned out. Forces which are even more rabidly nationalist than Milosevic-like paramilitary chief Arkan, who butchered civilians in Bosnia—hope to gain support after years on the margins.

Whenever a war starts it seems like there is "national unity". But twice in the last decade Serbian people have risen against Milosevic. In April 1991, during the previous war, 700,000 workers went on strike in Serbia. Milosevic had to use tanks to defeat them. Then in 1996 students and workers filled the streets of Belgrade for weeks demanding more democracy and improved living conditions. There was real hope that Milosevic would be toppled and that change was coming after the long dark days of war and suffering. Some sections of the opposition began to discuss freedom for Kosovo as one of their demands.

Kosovo is in a similar situation to East Timor. Both these small countries have been oppressed by a neighbouring regional power. Both were denied their rights to independence. In East Timor the possibility of independence only emerged with the outbreak of revolution in Indonesia itself. The opposition movement in Indonesia disowned Suharto's policy of repression in East Timor and championed independence.

A similar movement could have developed in Serbia if Western intervention had not helped to bolster Milosevic.

The plain fact is that NATO bombing is making life harder for the opposition in Serbia. If a foreign country dropped bombs on Dublin and killed hundreds of people, the first reaction of the vast majority would be to back "our" government, however right wing it was.

The horror of the war in the Balkans shows the sickness of a world that is built on profit and greed.

We have to fight for a world where dictators are abolished and useful production replaces the technology of death. Each of the B-2 Stealth bombers used by the US costs £1.5 billion.

The money used to produce ten such bombers would provide the basic

health and nutrition requirements of almost all the people across the world. That would prevent most of the 30,000 deaths a day of children under the age of five who die because of malnutrition and easily treated diseases. For the cost of five B-2s a year we could give every child in the world basic primary education.

Every cruise missile costs \$1 million. That money could provide the seeds and tools for 50,000 poor peasants in the Third World to grow their own food for a year. The vast sums wasted in the Serbian bombing could also remove many of the underlying causes of conflicts elsewhere in the world.

For example, the slaughter in Rwanda in 1994, when up to a million died, was partly because of the economic hardship in the country. A better life and an end to poverty would end most of the conflicts that kill so many people across the globe. Countries like the US and Britain say they will not cancel the Third World debt. Yet they will waste billions on killing people. Why not use that money to wipe away debt?

But to get this sort of decent society we need to get rid of the capitalist system and those who run it.

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